

## **Mt. Vernon Avenue Plan Meeting Notes May 26, 2004**

The following is a summary of the proceedings of the workshop held with the Mount Vernon Working Group on May 26, 2004. Those in attendance included:

### **Working Group:**

Bob Steele	Marilyn Doherty	Lois Walker	Joe Lavigne
Kevin Reilly	Bob Larson	Stephanie Sample	
David Fromm	Justin Wilson	Bill Hendrickson	
Harry Falconer	Marlin Lord	Tom Welsh	
Jesse Jennings, Planning Commission		Maria Wasowski (representing Mt. Jefferson)	
Rich Leibach, Planning Commission			

### **Other Attendees:**

Leland Ness  
Rob Maccubbin

### **Consultants:**

Matt Bell, Ehrenkrantz, Eckstut and Kuhn  
Paul Moyer, EDAW  
Bob Odermatt, The Odermatt Group

### **City Staff:**

Eileen Fogarty, Director  
Kimberley Fogle, Chief, Neighborhood Planning and Community Development  
Kathleen Beeton, Planner  
Eric Forman, Planner

### **Next Steps:**

Draft Plan circulation to Work Group in early July  
Community Meeting in early September

1. Kimberley Fogle outlined the meeting agenda and introduced the consultant team of Bob Odermatt, The Odermatt Group; Matt Bell, Ehrenkrantz, Eckstut and Kuhn; and, Paul Moyer, EDAW.
2. Bob Odermatt reviewed the topics discussed at the last work group meeting held on March 24, 2004. Topics included:
  - a. Parking Strategy;
  - b. Retail/marketing strategies;
  - c. Streetscape improvements; and
  - d. An introduction to form-based coding. Purpose of the form base coding is to create controls that allow modest increases in FAR when the proposed development is in compliance with performance standards.

3. Matt Bell presented the form-based code concept stating that zoning alone is insufficient to meet the objectives of the community. Matt presented an analysis of existing buildings along Mt. Vernon Avenue to understand what exists and to translate the observations into principles and guidelines to shape new development. He reviewed the unusual property line relationship between the building facades (located between 10-15 feet from the property line). He reviewed the following basic principles of the proposed form-based code for the historic core area:
- a. Parking is not permitted within 50 feet from of the front property line and within 6 feet of the rear property line;
  - b. The building coverage should not exceed 60 percent of the lot area;
  - c. Rear yard and parking lot screening concepts /requirements
  - d. Buildings along the street frontage should have a minimum height of 25 feet; a maximum height ranging from 35-40 feet depending on roof type;
  - e. Buildings should have a first floor 14 foot floor to floor height for ground floor retail, with minimum 40 feet depth of retail to create good retail spaces;
  - f. Building massing is to be controlled by a building enveloped to ensure that new commercial buildings do not impact sunlight to adjacent residential. While this is primarily true on the east side of Mt, Vernon, the principle applies to both sides of Mt. Vernon Avenue;
  - g. Varied roof types, including flat, sloped and a combination of flat and sloped, are deemed appropriate with the maximum height of 35-40 feet depending on type;
  - h. Street frontage – Buildings that have 100 percent coverage of the street frontage are desirable, however, a minimum of 75 percent is acceptable to allow for access, landscaping and garden walls; and
  - i. Corner sites, should provide access from side streets and the buildings should endeavor to provide full coverage on Mt, Vernon Avenue and to turn the corner and extend down the side street.

Question: What about smaller lots? Concern was expressed that they will be unbuildable.

Response from M Bell: This issue will be addressed further to ensure that smaller lots can be developed.

Question: Could building access be provided at corner rather than only at along the Avenue? Should there be side yard setback along side streets for outdoor dining?

Response from M Bell: Could allow building access at corner. A number of existing buildings have corner entries. As for building frontage along the side street, probably do not want setbacks; the building should define the corner, with outdoor seating along the Avenue to help provide vitality on Avenue.

- j. New building façades adjacent to existing buildings should align with one of the existing buildings, and new buildings should provide articulation of façade every 60 feet. The existing facades were analyzed and it was determined that 60 feet is most typical façade width;
- k. Projections/bays and recesses on front facades should be consistent with existing buildings storefronts;

Question: Where may the façade encroach into the 10'-15' roadway easement?

Response from K Fogle: Important to retain existing 10 foot setback in retail areas to get appropriate continuity of the sidewalks.

- l. The ratio of window/wall space should be established to maintain existing character of windows along ground floor and upper floor windows. Upper floor windows should have a minimum 1 to 1.5 vertical proportion;
- m. Non-internally illuminated awnings should be encouraged ;
- n. On corner properties, the storefront windows should be extended a minimum of 20 feet on the side street to wrap corner and provide storefront visibility from Mt. Vernon Avenue.

Question: Will proposed form-based code supercede existing Mt. Vernon Avenue Design Guidelines?

Response from K Fogle: The form-based code will supplement, not supercede, the existing design guidelines.

Question: It appears that the code will allow only single-loaded parking behind buildings. Could the parking be located closer than the required 50 feet, perhaps 45 feet, in order to get double-loaded parking?

Response from M Bell: As long as building form is appropriate along the Avenue and rear buffer is provided, it would be all right to reduce the setback to 45 feet.

Question: How many existing storefronts have 14 feet floor to floor heights?

Response from M Bell: Do not know the number of existing buildings that have that height, however, most retailers today want this ceiling height. Clarifies that this requirement is for newly constructed buildings.

Question: What encourages existing properties to conform to these guidelines? Will the form-based code create nonconforming situations with existing buildings that do not comply with this guideline?

Question from K Fogle: When existing buildings are renovated, must they comply with the guidelines. Is that what the group would like?

Work Group Comment: From a historic perspective, Mt. Vernon Avenue was originally residential and became commercial over time.

Probably do not want to force existing buildings, like the Anne Welsh salon building, to comply with these guidelines. Concern was expressed about new buildings pushing out older buildings.

Work Group Comment: For argument's sake, let's say 50 percent of buildings do not comply with the guidelines, but those people who renovate the buildings should look to contributing structures for suggestions to guide renovations. Concern that new projects are open to subjective review and that the proposed guidelines do not make it easy to get desired end result.

Response from M Bell: Old houses do not comply with guidelines. They are part of the historic fabric,

Response from K Fogle: Intent is to maintain historic buildings.

Comment: Aim is to protect existing buildings. New development needs to conform to these guidelines.

Response from M Bell: What do you want the street to look like? Are new homes like the old ones appropriate to get the street that you want? Buildings from a previous era define the character of the Avenue. How do you want the Avenue to look? Additionally, it is unlikely that the development community will construct new small single family houses and convert to retail uses.

Community Comment: Allow people to build to existing zoning, not using the overlay.

Community Comment: Concern about people demolishing existing buildings.

Response from K Fogle: The intent is to try to encourage people to retain and renovate their historic structures by promoting use of tax credits for renovations. The intent is to maintain the historic structures.

Response from Bob Odermatt: Under the proposed performance standards, one could not qualify for increases in development if the existing building is demolished.

Question: What happens in event that a property with a special use permit has parking that is removed? Can the SUP be changed?

Response from K Fogle: We need to look at that example.

Question: What happens to existing storefront churches?

Response from K Fogle: The intent is to strengthen and consolidate retail in the core area and south around Monroe Avenue.

Community Comment: Why not allow retail and/or restaurants in the Commonwealth District ? More opportunity in this area than in historic core or further south at Monroe Avenue.

Response from E Fogarty: The intent is to focus the retail in the core area. Restaurant uses tend to drive rents higher and retail uses have difficulty competing for space due to high rents.

Community Comment: May preclude retail uses by not encouraging restaurants in this area.

Question: Is the form-based code for only the core area or along the Avenue?

Response from E Fogarty: We are proposing the form based code in the core, but need to understand how it works outside the core area before we could recommend it for other districts of the Avenue. Over the summer, we will consider the scope of the form-based code. Fogarty explained that the reason the existing CL zoning has a low FAR is because the community did not want significant changes or increases in density in the past. The proposed form based code allows for reasonable change, with the preservation of historic buildings.

Question: If the draft plan allows retail and restaurant uses in the “triangle” opportunity site, why not allow them generally in the Commonwealth District?

Response from E Fogarty: A major issue related to restaurants is parking. In the core, we propose reducing or waiving requirements with a change of use or new infill development. One of the challenges is reducing parking requirements and allowing restaurants by-right. The community may have concerns about parking impacts if that occurred.

Community Comment: Disappointed that plan does not include retail and restaurant uses in the Commonwealth district. Seems that the core area is getting incentives and this area is not.

Responses from M Bell and B Odermatt: Commented that what makes retail successful is a walking distance of about 1000 feet or less; concentrated retail stores and ability to shop both sides of the street; and appearance of vitality. Otherwise, strip center type retail occurs which lacks character. People do not will typically not walk 2000 feet. King Street, while nearly a mile in length is a regional retail district, with several sub-districts, including restaurant, retail, office and government segments. King Street is a very different street than Mt. Vernon Avenue.

Community Comment: Please reconsider recommendations for Commonwealth District with regard to retail and restaurant uses.

Community Comment: Concern was expressed about pedestrian crossings at the intersection of Mt. Vernon and Commonwealth Avenues.

Response from K Fogle: The City will investigate existing crossings at that intersection.

4. Paul Moyer presented the two proposed opportunity sites, the “Triangle” sites north of Commonwealth Avenue along Mt. Vernon Avenue and the Giant and CVS sites on Monroe Avenue.

Question: What sorts of uses are envisioned on ground floor of the triangle site?

Response from P Moyer: Modest retail and restaurant uses mainly to serve the neighborhood.

Question: Is residential allowed on ground floor? If so, architecture should be different for various uses, i.e. residential, retail and retail. Handling loading and trash storage for the site are also important to consider.

Question: Should retail be allowed on Commonwealth Avenue frontage? Does Warwick Village want retail uses directly across the Avenue from them?

Response from P Moyer: We have heard that they would like some retail uses that would serve primarily the neighborhood, hence the recommendation for ground floor retail/restaurant uses.

Community Comment: Height of building appears very tall and bulky along Commonwealth Avenue and there is concern about how this building should transition to the primarily low-scale, single family residences.

Response from K Fogle: We will take a look at the potential scale and setback of new buildings on the site with regard to impacts on the residences east of Commonwealth Avenue.

Question: Is affordable housing being recommended as part of the plan?

Response from E Fogarty: City Council has been asking for greater contributions for affordable housing, and the Office of Housing is currently in the process of reviewing the affordable housing guidelines along those lines. The Plan recommends on-site affordable housing units for both of the opportunity sites.

Community Comment: The provision of facilities for trash storage and service operations needs to be considered and addressed as the opportunity sites redevelop.

Response from K Fogle: We will look into loading/service operations and trash storage/dumpster issues.

Question: Does the opportunity site on Monroe Avenue include the existing office building adjacent to Giant?

Response from P Moyer: No, it consists of the Giant and CVS properties only.

5. Kimberley Fogle presented the street graphics information and informed the work group that the citywide sign program was not included in the budget adopted last month by City Council, so the heritage sign program would have to move forward on its own. She presented various types of existing street signs in the City, in Old Town and Del Ray, as well as the proposal forwarded by Jim Snyder to replace the existing street signs in Del Ray with a new sign with a trolley on it.
6. Discussion by the group seemed to favor a larger scope for signs, including Commonwealth Avenue, beyond the boundaries of this study. As a consequence, the issue of streets signs will proceed separately and independent of this study.
7. Eileen Fogarty concluded the meeting by thanking work group members for their participation and good comments. She stated that the draft plan would be completed this summer for review and comment by work group members. A community meeting may also be held in late June, if possible given the many scheduling difficulties, before the beginning of summer. If it is not possible, a community meeting will be held in early fall.